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ABSTRACT

Effective communications strategies for delivering substance abuse and other prosocial behavior messages to African American inner city teenagers were studied. After pilot studies, the final sample consisted of middle school and high school students from the urban centers of New York City; Washington, D.C.; Camden (New Jersey); Philadelphia (Pennsylvania); and East Oakland (California). A total of 295 students participated in the focus group study, and surveys were completed by 387 students in several urban areas. It was found that the messages of the mainstream are generally reaching the wrong audience with the wrong information, because they are not really speaking to the urban African American adolescent. Rather than being homogeneous, street culture dissolves into a series of overlapping subcultures. Decisions about drugs and behavior are made very early. An analysis of the hip hop culture, including rap and other music forms, shows that these forms are not well-suited for conventional long-term public service message campaigns. An effective strategy for reaching this audience simply does not yet exist. It is recommended that a symposium of leading African American communicators, music producers, movie makers, and public health experts convene to seek a way to speak effectively to this population. The questionnaire and its responses are included with the report. (SLD)

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